United Nations S/PV.4916

Security Council

Fifty-ninth year

Provisional

4916th meeting

Thursday, 26 February 2004, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Wang Guangya	(China)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Baali
	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	Benin	Mr. Adechi
	Brazil	Mr. Sardenberg
	Chile	Mr. Acuña
	France	Mr. Duclos
	Germany	Mr. Pleuger
	Pakistan	Mr. Khalid
	Philippines	Mr. Baja
	Romania	Mr. Motoc
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Spain	Ms. Menéndez
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. King
	United States of America	Mr. Cunningham

Agenda

The situation in Georgia

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

04-25095 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Expression of condolences in connection with the death of the President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset of this meeting, I should like, on behalf of the members of the Security Council, to express profound sadness at the tragic death of His Excellency Mr. Boris Trajkovski, President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The Council conveys its condolences to the bereaved family and to the Government and the people of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Georgia

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Georgia, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the discussion without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Mr. Mikhail Saakashvili, President of Georgia, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): On behalf of the Council, I should like to extend a warm welcome to the President of Georgia.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by the President of Georgia, His Excellency Mr. Mikhail Saakashvili.

I now invite the President of Georgia, His Excellency Mr. Mikhail Saakashvili, to make his statement.

President Saakashvili: I thank you,Mr. President, and the other members of the Security Council for inviting me here today and giving me the opportunity to address the Council.

This is not my first time at the United Nations building. The Secretary-General used from time to time to teach a United Nations peacekeeping operations seminar at Columbia University here in New York, which I attended. We had heated arguments with him there, as he was not yet Secretary-General, but an Under-Secretary-General at that time, and a very promising one. As a student, I participated in a training programme here at United Nations Headquarters, and I enjoyed it greatly. I am even one of the 200 trainees who had a photograph taken with Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and I value that photograph and keep it with great respect.

In fact, I even addressed the Security Council once before, but that was in another place and at another time. As a third-year student at Kiev State University, I was leader of the Soviet delegation to the model United Nations in The Hague. Out of all the Soviet students, I had won a competition on the best knowledge of the United Nations system. It was 1989, and I was appointed as "Ambassador of France to the Security Council". So I was there in The Hague, and on the first day I sharply attacked the position of the Soviet delegation — with great internal joy. The next day, I managed to veto a draft resolution proposed by the United States delegation. I did not mean in any way to show France as an aggressive or non-conciliatory member of the Council, but some people told me back in 1989 that I behaved and sounded very much like a real Frenchman. It was a great honour.

Now, this second time addressing the Council, I am much wiser and much more constructive. I am happy to be here as President of my country, Georgia.

Before going to the essence of my statement, I want to express my deep grief at the death of the President of Macedonia. I know how the people of that country must be feeling right now, and I appreciate your words of sympathy, Mr. President. On behalf of my country, I also want to extend deep condolences to the struggling people of that country, who have suffered so much during the last several years and who, I am sure, will have a great future. The late President laid the foundations for that future.

This is a very special opportunity for me, an opportunity to discuss some of the most urgent, most important and most critical challenges facing my nation. It is clear to me that much work needs to be done if we hope to advance the cause of lasting peace and stability in my country and in my region of the world, a region that for far too long has been beset by poverty, suffering, separatist conflicts and tragedy.

Georgia is a small country located in an extremely important geographic region, which is both complex and rich: complex given its long and proud history and rich given its ethnic diversity and unique cultural heritage.

I believe, as President of Georgia, that all of us here at the United Nations have a moral obligation to advance the cause of peace and security wherever it is threatened.

Unfortunately, it is still threatened in Georgia today. Today, Georgia still suffers from the painful wounds of civil conflict, wounds that have left hundreds of thousands homeless, separated families and destroyed the future of a generation.

As the democratically elected leader of my nation, it is my responsibility and my obligation to do everything in my power to try to heal those wounds and to build a better, brighter, more peaceful and more stable future for all citizens of Georgia.

As all who are gathered here today know, the citizens of Georgia made history during the month of November. Using peaceful, non-violent methods, they rose up in defence of the principles of freedom and democracy. The Georgian nation did something truly remarkable during our "revolution of roses". They showed the entire world that they dared to believe in a better future. They showed the entire word that Georgia is a nation characterized by a deep and universal commitment to the values of liberal democracy.

The revolution of roses did not take place as a result of years of chronic energy shortages, endless corruption or economic decline. The revolution did not take place because of anger over wage and pension arrears. The revolution did not take place because people came out to support me personally. Our rose revolution occurred because the previous Government tried to rob our citizens of their last and most precious right: the right to freely choose their Government, to freely chose their future and to live in a peaceful and stable society. I am proud of the values that unite our people, values that firmly establish Georgia's national identity, which is rooted in the very principles that led to the creation of this Organization.

On behalf of our new Government, I would like to once again state our unwavering commitment to the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. I would like to thank the Secretary-General's Group of Friends of Georgia and the forces on the ground serving in the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) for their dedication, hard work and commitment to peace. In particular, I would like to thank Heidi Tagliavini for her tireless efforts.

We are encouraged by certain positive developments in the peace process, and I would like to highlight some of them. We welcome the development of the Geneva process and attach great importance to the outcome of that process. The task forces established in that framework may form a powerful mechanism for the entire peace process. However, we expect the Geneva process to be results-oriented in all three designated directions. The expectations are very high, and no effort must be spared to avoid the transformation of the Geneva process into a debating society. Certain specific developments are of particular importance to the advancement of peace. Specifically, the deployment of a civilian police unit in the Gali region is a real and positive step forward that should be fully implemented. We consider the new approach a necessary instrument for the return of the internally displaced persons and refugees.

Two weeks ago, I visited Moscow and spent more than four hours speaking with Mr. Putin. It was a very constructive and positive meeting. I came to Moscow with my hand extended in peace and friendship and that hand was met. For the first time since Georgia regained its independence in 1991, I began to get the sense that a new door is opening leading towards the establishment of truly positive relations.

In my opinion, Mr. Putin is a strong, thoughtful, pragmatic and engaged leader. For the first time, we were able to move beyond the poisonous rhetoric of the past and define a common set of interests. That development created a spark of hope. At the same time, I have no illusions that our relationship will be transformed overnight. Real challenges lie along the path towards establishing a long-term positive relationship.

In order to confront and solve the challenges that divide our nations — challenges that have led to mistrust and misunderstanding — Mr. Putin will have to apply a new degree of political will and leadership towards resolution of the conflict and the creation of lasting peace, and he has expressed his strong desire to act in that direction. I am also ready to move forward; however, we will need to apply a greater degree of energy and demonstrate a new level of commitment, if lasting peace is to be achieved.

In concrete terms, that will mean ending Russia's policy of providing citizenship to the population of the conflict regions. It will mean either ending the visa-free regime now in place in Abkhazia and the former South Ossettia, or introducing the same kind of regime for every individual inhabitant and citizen of Georgia, in conjunction with the Georgian Central Government and the Georgian authorities — not unilaterally with unrecognized local authorities. It will mean putting a stop to illegal acquisition of property on Abkhazian soil. Each transaction and each such acquisition should be properly registered by the Central Authority in Georgia, according to Georgian law; otherwise, they will have no legal force.

Today, I issue an appeal to all members of the Security Council to work together to reverse those damaging policies which reduce the chance for lasting peace and security.

I would like to use this opportunity to present to the Security Council our vision for achieving progress through the peace process led by the United Nations. We maintain that the definition of Abkhazia's political status, as outlined in the Boden paper, provides the key to resolving the conflict.

However, I would like to use this opportunity to issue a call to the Abkhaz people to rise above the confrontation and seize the unique window of opportunity now open due to the recent developments and changes in Georgia. That window of opportunity offers us a chance to jointly build a new common future.

We are talking about a very desperate place, a place where the pre-war population was at least 10 times greater and 20 times richer than it is now. We are talking about a situation where, just being ethnically Georgian means that you will be automatically killed if you enter that territory. That is not a situation which can be tolerated for whatever diplomatic considerations by this respectable body. Council members know perfectly well that it is a classical situation of ethnic cleansing and a situation that goes totally against every principle of humanity.

From that situation, returning to my vision, I note that not only Georgians are suffering, but also the ethnic Abkhaz, ethnic Russians, ethnic Ukrainians, ethnic Estonians, ethnic Greeks and ethnic Jews — all of whom lived there before the war, some of whom continue to live there.

So we need to find solutions that will lead to a future defined and based upon the firmest guarantees of security, human rights and the promise of living in a free and open society.

In order to promote that process and give it genuine meaning, I am ready to guarantee the highest possible degree of autonomy to Abkhazia within the Georgian State and am committed to dedicating and directing enormous resources towards the development of Abkhazia's economy. However, Abkhazia's economic potential can only be realized when the internally displaced persons of all ethnic origins are allowed to return.

It is here that the political process must do its work and must provide an institutional framework for the return of the internally displaced persons, reconciliation and lasting stability. We are ready to consider all kinds of different relationships. Broad autonomy, of course, a United Georgian State, elements of a federal relationship between the centre and the subjects of the country should all be part of a negotiated settlement that provides, first, for the territorial integrity of Georgia and secondly, for firm guarantees for human rights.

I stand before you today as the President of a nation that just completed a non-violent revolution which created enormous and positive change. We achieved this change without even the slightest hint of violence and without setting brother against brother. Our accomplishment is a direct indication of Georgia's ability and commitment to bring about dramatic, difficult and very positive changes under the banner of national unity. That turn of events gives me hope and confidence that we can build a new relationship based on the trust and cooperation of all.

I am in the process of travelling all around the world. We had a very good meeting with President

Putin, a perfect, excellent meeting yesterday with President Bush in Washington and a very good meeting with Chancellor Schroeder. I am looking forward to going to France and meeting with President Chirac. France has done a lot for Georgia over these many years, especially in conjunction with other friends of the Secretary-General in connection with the conflict.

We have noted regional cooperation, but primarily, we need to deal with our internal problems, and that is where we also count on members of the Council and our other friends. The entire world watched our peaceful "rose revolution" on CNN — and that term itself was simultaneously invented by one of the Georgian independent television channels and CNN. I am sure that the Abkhaz were also paying close attention to it.

If the revolution embodies a message, it is that the new leadership in Tbilisi is offering a new set of values and principles. The new Government has demonstrated its firm political will by cracking down on those forces that believe that solutions to conflict are based on violence or on using illegitimate means against people. Unlike the previous Government that was weak or sometimes tolerant towards the use of violence and criminal acts, we have firmly and resolutely proven that such a road leads nowhere. It is a road with a dead end.

It is time for the de facto leadership in Abkhazia to take similar steps to promote peace and to recognize that their current path is counter-productive and will only lead to more dead ends.

As I said before, there is a unique window of opportunity in Georgia today, one that gives credibility and promise to the advancement of peace. If the Security Council is serious about bringing lasting peace to Abkhazia and finding a genuine solution, we must enhance and strengthen our efforts.

Within the Geneva process, there was also a process initiated in Sochi by President Putin, which we consider to be a part of the Geneva process. That process also has to advance.

We must work harder today so that those who have suffered can rebuild their future tomorrow. No one here underestimates the complexity and difficulty of that challenge. At the same time, this conflict has gone on too long. For too long we have sat around the table trading accusations and threats instead of sharing ideas and proposals that would lead to a lasting solution.

For all those forces that are unable or unwilling to make that commitment, the Security Council must establish a firm and clear policy in support of peace and reconciliation and reject violence and further division. The Security Council must make it clear that those who are not on the side of peace will be held accountable, that there will be sanctions, that visas will not be issued and that the International Criminal Court awaits those who perpetrate criminal acts, regardless of their ethnic origin.

I am proud to stand before the Council today and tell members that the new Government in Tbilisi, led by myself and my team, are ready to be held accountable and ready to provide the necessary leadership and political will.

At my inauguration in January, when visitors from across the globe travelled to Tbilisi, including United States Secretary of State Colin Powell and Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and representatives of the presidency of the European Union, I dedicated my presidency to the peaceful restoration of Georgia's complete and total territorial integrity.

I made a promise and a pledge on the first day of my presidency to ensure the rights and freedoms of all citizens of Georgia and to celebrate the rich tapestry of Georgia's multi-ethnic composition. I believe that our diversity is in fact our strongest and most important asset. I stand by that pledge and promise today and ask all of you to join me with renewed energy, dedication, commitment and purpose that Georgia will once again become a prosperous, stable and fully unified nation.

Our contribution to peace and stability in the world will be to be strong, to be adequate, to have a free and transparent society and to respect human rights, the rule of law and the rights of each individual. I am sure that we will achieve such a society because we have accomplished quiet miracles throughout these years, especially last year, which was the proudest for me personally and for the whole current generation of Georgians. We want to extend that proud moment of our history and transform Georgia into a stronger and, of course, responsible member of the international community. We need the Council's help with that. I thank the Council for its support and cooperation.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the President of Georgia for his important statement. May I take this opportunity to express, on behalf of the Security Council, our appreciation to the President of Georgia for taking the time to come to brief the Council.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.